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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2008

In Today's Papers

TGS Chief Basbug Calls on NGOs to Support the Social Fight Against the PKK

Sabah, Hurriyet, Milliyet, Vatan, Cumhuriyet, Radikal, Zaman and others: General Basbug paid his first visit as the Chief of General Staff to the Southern province of Diyarbakir. General Basbug and military commanders met with Diyarbakir Governor Huseyin Avni Mutlu and representatives of non-governmental organizations. Islamist-oriented Zaman says General Basbug asked for the NGO's assistance in regard to the social aspect of the fight against terrorism. Mainstream Vatan reports that during the meeting with the NGOs, General Basbug said "the PKK is at a breaking point. In order to eliminate the PKK, people should show great determination against the terrorist organization."

Gul Breaks a Fundamental Taboo and Goes to Armenia

Reaction to Gul's visit to Yerevan remains overwhelmingly positive in the mainstream and Islamist news outlets as they focus on the details of the trip and the good will gestures involved in the trip.

However, nationalist outlets harshly criticize Gul for going to Armenia and circulate provocative rumors to paint the visit in a negative light. Islamist-oriented Zaman notes that Armenian President Sarkisian will honor President Gul with "an Iftar at the Presidential Palace" before the World Cup qualifying soccer match between Turkey and Armenia on September 6th. In addition, the paper notes during the bilateral meetings "Gul will support the establishment of a commission of historians who can examine the genocide claims, invite Armenia to join the Caucasus Platform, and discuss the Nagorno Karabakh dispute." Mainstream Aksam reports "Yerevan will ask that the border be opened between Turkey and Armenia," but that Gul will "pressure Armenia to abandon its genocide claims" and also "to withdraw its troops from Nagorno Karabakh." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak praises Gul in "The Bravest Step: Gul's Decision to Go to Armenia is seen as open-minded Turkish foreign policy." Liberal Radikal reports PM Erdogan supports Gul's visit by saying, "You cannot achieve any objectives by running from the table." Mainstream Hurriyet makes a comment on football diplomacy by noting, "Turkish Armenians Will Attend the Match and Wave the Turkish Flag." Leftist Taraf carries the headline, "Gul

Breaks a Taboo," as "Gul's visit to Yerevan breaks a 93-year period by starting a new era of relations," which, "breaks one of Turkey's most fundamental taboos." Star daily says President Gul will invite President Sarkisian to the follow-up game in Istanbul on October 14, 2009 between the Turkish and Armenian national teams.

Meanwhile, beginning with an unsourced report on nationalist news channel, Haberturk, some media focused on claims an Armenian terrorist would attend the match as a guest of Armenian officials. In "So-Called Provocation," Radikal reports, "Someone tried to cast a shadow over Gul's trip to Armenia with baseless charges that Gul will watch the match together with an Orly massacre suspect," referring to a terrorist attack in June 1983 in which a bomb killed eight at the Turkish Airlines' desk at Paris' Orly airport. Radikal cites the Haberturk report, who ran a story last night claiming "a terrorist who was responsible for the Orly massacre will watch the match as an official guest of the Armenian government," but Radikal called the Haberturk story "a provocation" and "a baseless report which attempted to undermine Gul's visit." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet, meanwhile, gives credit to the claims in "Gul's Controversial Visit." The paper reports "Heated debates were triggered when it was learned that Gul will watch the game together with the Orly massacre suspect." Cumhuriyet also notes CHP Leader Deniz Baykal sarcastically suggested, "Why doesn't Gul just go ahead and lay a wreath at the genocide memorial in Yerevan?" Nationalist Tercuman notes Gul is going to Yerevan "despite the reactions of the Turkish people." Meanwhile, CNNTurk reports, "Armenian officials reject reports that terrorist Varujan Garbisian is among the VIP guests who will watch the September 6th soccer match."

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International Praise and Domestic Criticism Regarding the Visit
Mainstream and Islamist outlets proudly embrace international praise for Turkey's efforts to soften its relationship with Armenia. Both the EU and the U.S. showered praise on Gul's acceptance of the invitation to attend the World Cup qualifying soccer match between Turkey and Armenia. CNNTurk reports, "Matt Bryza says Gul's visit will accelerate the solution to the Nagorno Karabakh issue." In "The U.S. is Also Pleased," Islamist-oriented Zaman reports, "U.S. State Department Spokesperson for Europe Mark Toner noted 'We welcome Gul's decision and we congratulate the two presidents for coming together and exerting efforts toward peace and reconciliation.'" Zaman also reports EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn "greeted Turkey's decision with pleasure," and noted, "This visit will be included in the next report" regarding Turkey's EU accession.

Papers also cover negative reactions from the two opposition parties, CHP and MHP. MHP Deputy Chairman Vural urged President Gul not to go to Yerevan. CHP leader Baykal sarcastically asked President Gul to lay a wreath at the Genocide Monument in Yerevan. PM Erdogan defended Gul amidst such criticism by saying, "We think that this is a positive thing and Foreign Minister Babacan will accompany Gul. There will be talks between the two presidents, and the foreign ministry officials of both sides will follow up." Regarding possible reaction from Baku about the Yerevan trip, PM Erdogan told reporters that he explained the visit to Azeri President Aliyev recently. Zaman reports President Gul will make an official visit to Baku before he goes to the United States on September 20.

Editorial Commentary on the President's Trip to Armenia:

Ferai Tinc commented in mainstream Hurriyet: "President Gul's decision to go to Yerevan is a strong step toward peace in the Caucasus. Gul's visit sets a good example for solving problems through peaceful means as opposed to use of force like the Russia-Georgia example. Armenia should no longer be left out of the economic cooperation zone between Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia. Given the current domestic conditions, both the Armenian and Turkish presidents have taken brave steps."

Murat Yetkin advised in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "So far the Armenian genocide issue has been a burden that has shackled Turkish

foreign policy. It was also a negative point in Turkish-American relations. American presidents have intervened at the last minute to prevent a vote on a U.S. congressional resolution recognizing the events of 1915 as genocide. From now on, the only way to keep this resolution off the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives is for Turkey to develop relations with Armenia. Turkey should be able to move forward in its relationship with Armenia by keeping in mind its role as a regional player. Unlike his predecessor, President Sarkisian clearly indicates his will to normalize bilateral ties and adds that the genocide issue is not a precondition for Turkish-Armenian relations. If this visit becomes a successful one, President Gul will be remembered for his historic decision, despite efforts that criticize the visit."

Mahmut Ovrur wrote in mainstream Sabah: "It seems that President Gul's visit to Yerevan will be a turning point in the tense relations between Turkey and Armenia. The positive approach to a football game could extend to positive developments regarding trade. In addition, the opening of the Kars border gate may be discussed. As a matter of fact, this visit is a very good start not only for Turkey-Armenia relations but also is good for bilateral ties among all Turkey's neighbors. President Gul made a very brave and historic decision by going to Yerevan."

Fikret Bila wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "Prior to his visit to Yerevan, President Gul told Baku that this visit will also serve

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Azerbaijan's interests. With this visit, President Gul will make a positive start for the future. Presidents Gul and Sarkisian will meet prior to the football game and later the foreign ministers of the both countries will continue bilateral dialogue. The general expectation from this meeting is to open discussions for the future of the Caucasus, not to resolve Turkey's historic problems with Armenia."

Ali Bayramoglu wrote in Islamist-leaning Yeni Safak: "President Gul has taken a giant step toward the future of Turkish-Armenian relations. By establishing relations with Armenia through bilateral dialogue, Turkey can get rid of its 'genocide baggage.' Closer ties between Turkey and Armenia will also make important contribution to the ongoing peace efforts in the Caucasus."

Mustafa Balbay in leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet: "PM Erdogan approves of President Gul's travel to Yerevan, but doesn't want AKP lawmakers to accompany Gul. Thus, it could be said that Gul is embarking on this trip without the backing of his party. Has Armenia announced a review of its traditionally anti-Turkish policies? No. On the contrary, this visit may send the signal that Turkey does not object to Armenia's claims. Some comments that this visit will draw Turks and Armenians closer are wrong, because Turks and Armenians are already close to each other. Aside from the radical elements on both sides, we see no serious problem. Nevertheless, may the best team win in Yerevan."

Ihsan Dagi in Islamist-oriented Zaman: "With President Gul going to Yerevan, Turkey's soft power may have reached Armenia. The way to strengthen this effort would be establishing ties gradually and opening the border with Armenia. Turkey did not lose anything by taking the initiative in Cyprus after 2002. Turkey pushed the dynamics for change in Cyprus and a similar initiative must be taken regarding Armenia. Turkey's efforts regarding Armenia should not be restricted to the President's visit; the government, also, should be able to take such initiatives."

Praise for Turkey as a Peacemaker - Israel/Syria Talks
Media outlets note the public praise for Turkey as a peacemaker from French President Sarkozy and Syrian President Assad. Mainstream Hurriyet reports "Sarkozy praised Turkey," for its efforts in the Israeli/Syria peace talks, while Syrian President Assad said "We could not have conducted these peace talks without my brother Erdogan." Mainstream Sabah reports, "French President Sarkozy praises the peace talks between Israel and Syria that were carried out by Erdogan." Mainstream Milliyet reports, "Sarkozy says Europe Appreciates Turkish Efforts." Mainstream Aksam reports "Sarkozy Applauds Turkey at a Meeting in Damascus," and "while Sarkozy

opposes Turkey's EU entry, this time he praised Turkey." CNN Turk reports, "Sarkozy Hails Turkey for its efforts in peace negotiations between Israel and Syria."

Editorial Commentary on Turkish Peace Efforts between Israel-Syria

Mustafa Unal in Islamist-oriented Zaman: "Even though the talks were indirect, Turkey initiated talks between Syria and Israel. Now, direct talks between the two countries will commence after the presidential elections in the U.S. The summit in Damascus also brought Arab nations and Europe to the same table, which inspires hopes toward peace and stability. While the talks did not produce concrete results, Turkey has become a bridge that connects the European and Arab Worlds."

RTUK Director Charged with Laundering Charity Funds to Turkey
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Radikal, and Cumhuriyet report independent lawmaker Kamer Genc and opposition CHP lawmaker Cetin Soysal submitted separate motions to parliament in connection with a German High Court case alleging money laundering by the Turkish-owned Deniz Feneri Islamic charity. According to the German indictment, the funds were sent to several points in Turkey, including some media

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outlets such as the Islamist-leaning broadcaster Kanal 7 TV. Genc said "Deniz Feneri managers raised around 41 million Euros by exploiting the religious feelings of Turks in Germany," and "transferred part of those funds to Turkey instead of helping needy people." Genc asked if PM Erdogan was planning an investigation into the alleged ties between the organization in Germany with the Deniz Feneri Society in Turkey. He also asked whether the Radio and Television High Board (RTUK) chairman Zahid Akman, a former partner of Deniz Feneri in Germany, was involved. Mainstream Hurriyet reports Akman, who stands charged with money laundering, was barred by the court from entering Germany from May 2007 to May 2012 because of additional investigations regarding Akman's possible illegal activities in Germany. Other suspects charged in connection to the Frankfurt case accused Akman of being a courier. Akman denied the charges in a press briefing yesterday, and said he would go to Germany soon to clear his name. German legal experts say Akman will be detained if attempts to enter Germany, according to Hurriyet.

PKK 'Pardons' Riza Altun
Media outlets report Riza Altun, a top PKK member in charge of the organization's funds in Europe, was pardoned for embezzlement. Last year Altun was sacked for embezzling PKK money and cooperating with foreign intelligence agents. However, following an interrogation on Mount Kandil, Altun has been pardoned. According to unnamed sources, PKK leaders Murat Karayilan and Murat Karasu wanted Altun to be executed. Altun was captured in France in 2007 but was later released. He was detained in Austria for forgery in July 2007, but was allowed to go to Mount Kandil despite Turkey's requests for his extradition.

TV News:
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- On Friday, PM Erdogan will meet U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns at the PM office of Dolmabahce Palace in Istanbul. Later that afternoon, Erdogan will meet with Georgian PM Lado Gurgenedze in the same location.

- Opposition MHP MP Oktay Vural said AKP vice-chairman Saban Disli resigned amid bribery charges in order to protect PM Erdogan, and not to give the public a message against corruption.

- Renowned seismology specialist Professor Ahmet Mete Isikara predicts an intense earthquake in Istanbul between 2010 and 2014.

International News

- Greek Cypriot Foreign Minister Markos Kyprianou said Greek Cypriots could not afford to make any more concessions regarding a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation.

- EU foreign ministers will meet to discuss their line on Russia ahead of talks next week between the French and Russian presidents on the Georgia crisis.

- Alaska Governor Sarah Palin said the United States sent troops to fight in the Iraq war on a "task from God."

WILSON